



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Press Release

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Cal/EPA Helping Counties and Cities Recover Clean-up Funds from FEMA after Southern California Fires

Ash report shows the immediate need for debris clean up

SACRAMENTO – The California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) is helping several Southern California counties and cities recover millions of dollars in clean-up costs following the 2007 Southern California fires.

A report released by Cal/EPA shows that the significant amount of ash and debris left in the wake of the fires posed an immediate danger to the health and safety of the environment and its citizens, therefore necessitating immediate clean up.

“Post-disaster debris removal is an important aspect of both response and recovery,” said Don Johnson, Cal/EPA’s Assistant Secretary for Emergency Response. “We’re confident that FEMA will agree that immediate debris cleanup was absolutely necessary and reimburse counties and cities for their quick action to protect citizens.”

The Federal government and California provide specific assistant grants for this kind of activity, as long as sampling shows that the debris posed an immediate risk. The counties and cities must match 25 percent of those funds.

The fires which burned throughout seven counties, scorched more than 350,000 acres, destroyed more than 2,200 residential and commercial structures and ruined more than 2,000 vehicles in San Bernardino and San Diego Counties alone.

Due to the immediate threat to human health and the environment, Cal/EPA determined that the material necessitated immediate cleanup and is now assisting local governments through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reimbursement application process. FEMA will reimburse up to 75% of eligible costs.

The report demonstrates that the counties met the criteria needed to obtain funding for “debris removal from private property.” The report shows that concentration levels of arsenic, cadmium, copper and lead were found to be higher than health-based criteria allowed, threatening the environment and safety of citizens.

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Analysis determined the following specific results:

- Cadmium was found in more than half of the ash samples. The average concentration of cadmium was 14.7 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg) of ash. This is greater than eight times the healthful limit set in California and more than 50 times the background level found in California soil. Cadmium may cause respiratory problems, headaches, muscle aches, nausea, and vomiting, and may affect the kidneys.
- Lead was found in all ash samples. The average concentration of lead was 1,078 mg/kg, which is seven times the healthful limit and more than 24 times the background level found in California soil. Exposure to lead can cause weakness, anemia, abdominal pain, and kidney and central nervous system disorders.

To date California has paid San Diego County, San Diego City and San Bernardino County more than \$50 million in clean-up reimbursements. To view the fully report, go to: www.calepa.ca.gov/Disaster/fire.

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